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Washington celebrates "Farmers Market Week" Aug. 11 – 18

OLYMPIA – More than 70 farmers markets across the state of Washington promote direct sales of fresh Pacific Northwest agricultural products to consumers. In recognition of the contributions farmers markets make to Washington communities, Gov. Gary Locke has declared Aug. 11 – 18 Farmers Market Week.

Special events, such as demonstrations by chefs using Washington produce, children's activities, and highlighting a farmer or a new crop, are planned at various farmers markets throughout the state. (Contact your local farmers market for events in your area.)

"Consumers benefit from the freshness, quality and wide selection of locally grown products," said Leslie Zenz, coordinator, Small Farm and Direct Marketing Program at the state Department of Agriculture. "Meeting and interacting with the farmers who grow the food develops in consumers a special bond of trust in the integrity and accountability of our growers."

Nationally, a 1995 survey of 775 farmers markets conducted by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) shows that more than 6,000 small farm operators sell their products only at farmers markets. Small farm operators are those with less than $250,000 in annual receipts who work and manage their own operations. About 94 percent of the nation's farms are small farm operations.

USDA reports 2,863 farmers markets operate throughout the nation – a record number, up from 2,410 in 1996 and 1,755 in 1994. Sales generated by farmers markets have been estimated to exceed $1 billion a year, with most of the money going directly to small family farmers.

A copy of the governor's proclamation and a list of Washington state farmers markets is available on the Internet at http://www.wafarmersmarkets.com.

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